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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3703
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1521
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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2469
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000538

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: BERDIMUHAMEDOV VISIT TO KABUL A
DEMONSTRATION OF GOOD INTENTIONS

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: Turkmenistan's president arrived April 28 for a one-day visit in Kabul. Although the two presidents see opportunities in an expanded relationship, the projects they are most interested in will require further commitment, cooperation, and funding. The first two elements are advancing, but funding remains an issue. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (U) President Berdimuhamedov traveled to Kabul on April 28 for a one-day official visit, the first such visit by a Turkmen president to Afghanistan. He met with Afghanistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, President Karzai, and with representatives of an Afghan-based Association of Turkmen, according to Afghan Charge Haji Rooz Noor. (NOTE: Noor said he had served as a governor in northern Afghanistan before this diplomatic assignment. As governor, he said, he had enjoyed a close and productive relationship with U.S. diplomats. END NOTE.)

FOCUS ON EXPANDING COOPERATION

¶4. (SBU) Noor, who met with Charge and PolOff on April 28, said the two presidents would sign a memorandum during the visit intended to expand the bilateral relationship in the energy, transportation, fuel, and agriculture sectors. According to press reports, two memoranda on transportation and energy cooperation were to be signed, as well as an agreement on scientific and cultural cooperation and a joint communiqué. Berdimuhamedov and Karzai were also slated to discuss water issues.

NO MOVEMENT ON TAPI EXPECTED

¶5. (SBU) Noor said he did not expect any new developments during Berdimuhamedov's visit regarding the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline (TAPI), although Turkmenistan's and Afghanistan's governments are both working hard to advance the project. The construction of a railroad from the Turkmen border that would transit

Afghanistan and continue to neighboring countries, as well as regional security issues were also expected to top the agenda.

BERDIMUHAMEDOV PLAYS UP TURKMENISTAN ASSISTANCE

¶6. (U) During a public statement, President Berdimuhamedov took the opportunity to describe humanitarian assistance Turkmenistan's government delivered to its neighbor during the harsh winter, and added that Turkmen electricity and gas was continuing to be sold to Afghanistan at reduced prices. He also mentioned joint reconstruction projects that are underway to extend Afghanistan's electricity infrastructure further into its provinces.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: The visit represented a desire on the part of both governments to try to advance several priority projects such as TAPI, the railroad and electricity initiatives. TAPI has its own impediments, such as pipeline security, that will need to be overcome. The other two projects, however, have fewer issues to resolve. However, it remains unlikely that TAPI or the other two projects will advance at a modest pace unless he decides it is in Turkmenistan's interest to finance at least some portion of the costs. Turkmenistan's president may be hoping that international assistance to Afghanistan will pay most -- if not all -- of the costs of these projects, limiting Turkmenistan's role to that of a neighboring supplier. END COMMENT.
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